

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

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FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2921

INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CONFIDENTIAL YAOUNDE 1026

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CM, NI

SUBJECT: CAMEROON-NIGERIA BORDER SITUATION

REF: YAOUNDE 2539, 2909

1. SUMMARY. IN RESPONSE LAGOS PRESS REPORT ON NIGERIA-CAMEROON BORDER DIFFICULTIES WHICH APPARENTLY GIVEN EXAGGERATED TREATMENT, GURC HAS ISSUED LOW KEY STATEMENT TO STRESS ITS DETERMINATION TO RESOLVE ANY SUCH DIFFICULTIES IN SPIRIT OF AFRICAN UNITY AND OF JUSTICE AND EQUITY.

2. CAMEROON NEWS AGENCY (ACAP) REPORTED THAT NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER "DAILY TIMES" HAD QUOTED NIGERIAN MILITARY AUTHORITY AS MENTIONING "FRONTIER DIFFICULTIES" BETWEEN CAMEROON AND NIGERIA. CAMEROON GOVERNMENT CIRCLES, ACAP ASSERTED, WERE SURPRISED OVER REPORTS ALLEGING THAT "CAMEROONIAN GENDARMES" WERE HARASSING AND ATTACKING NIGERIANS IN THE CONTESTED FRONTIER ZONE. THESE CIRCLES POINTED OUT THAT STRICT INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN GIVEN TO CAMEROON POLICEFORCES IN FRONTIER AREA TO AVOID ALL ACTION CONTRARY TO TWO PRINCIPLES OF CAMEROONIAN DIPLOMACY: RESPECT FOR SOVEREIGNTY OF STATES, AND ESTABLISHMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF FRIENDLY AND NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS. CAMEROON, CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY STATED, IS ALWAYS READY TO MAKE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

TO FINDING RAPID AND MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY SOLUTION TO
PROBLEM OF LAND AND SEA BORDERS WITH NIGERIA.

3. NIGERIAN AMBASSADOR SADA TOLD ME THAT PRESS MUST
BEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR CREATING A SITUATION WHICH SHOULD NOT
HAVE ARisen. AS HE UNDERSTANDS ORIGIN, THE NEW MILITARY
COMMANDER AT CALABAR WAS INTERVIEWED BY DAILY TIMES SEVERAL
WEEKS AGO AND WAS ASKED ABOUT BORDER SITUATION. HE
APPARENTLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE HAD BEEN PROBLEMS
IN PAST, BUT SAID THAT NIGERIA WAS NOT GOING TO WAR OVER
THEM AND THAT THEY COULD BE SOLVED IN GOOD NEIGHBORLY SPIRIT.
THIS SUBJECT WAS ACTUALLY ONLY A SMALL PART OF INTERVIEW
BUT WAS GIVEN INFLAMMATORY HEADLINE BY DAILY TIMES.
LATER IT WAS PICKED UP BY AFP WHICH "HELPFULLY" REPORTED
IT BACK TO CAMEROON.

4. SADA SAID THAT AS FAR AS HE AWARE SITUATION IN BORDER
AREA WAS QUIET. HE HAD VISITED AREA, AS WE KNEW, SOME
MONTHS AGO WHEN FISHING FAMILIES WERE FLEEING TO CALABAR
BECAUSE OF CONCERN OVER HARASSMENT (REFTELS). MANY HAD
NOW RETURNED IN RESPONSE TO GURC INVITATION. HE FOUND
GURC STATEMENT FRIENDLY AND MODERATE BUT QUESTIONED
WHETHER IT WARRANTED BY ACTUAL SITUATION. HE ADDED THAT FONOFF
HAD NOT CALLED HIM IN (AS OF APRIL 2) TO DISCUSS MATTER.

5. WHEN I SAW FONOFF SECGEN OWONO APRIL 3 I MENTIONED
ACAP STATEMENT. HE OBSERVED THAT IT HAD BEEN PREPARED BY
MININFO IN COLLABORATION WITH PRESIDENCY AND THAT FONOFF
WAS NOT CONSULTED. DAILY TIMES REPORT, HE ACKNOWLEDGED,
HAD BEEN BLOWN UP BY PRESS BUT PRESIDENT BELIEVED IT DESIRABLE
TO HAVE A STATEMENT ISSUED TO KEEP EMOTIONS FROM GETTING OUT
OF HAND. IT IS IN PRESIDENT'S NATURE TO SEEK BY ALL MEANS
TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION. LAND AND SEA BORDERS IN SOUTH ARE A
CONTENTIOUS ISSUE WHICH SHOULD BE RESOLVED. BASIC DIFFICULTY
IS THAT NIGERIAN CLAIMS ARE INFLUENCED BY PETROLEUM PROSPECTS
WHEREAS GURC CLAIMS ARE BASED ON SIMPLE ISSUE OF
SOVEREIGNTY (SIC). PRESIDENT DOES NOT WANT OUTSIDE MEDIATION
SINCE PROBLEM IS ONE THAT GOOD NEIGHBORS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
SETTLE BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

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6. I QUERIED OWONO AS TO WHETHER GURC STATEMENT COULD
BE INTERPRETED AS INVITATION TO NIGERIA TO NEGOTIATE PROBLEM
NOW. THIS HE DOUBTED, BELIEVING THE MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO
DAMPEN POTENTIAL REACTIONS IN NIGERIA. WHEN I COMMENTED
THAT GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN GENERAL GOWON AND
AHIDJO SHOULD FACILITATE A SETTLEMENT TO BORDER PROBLEM,
OWONO EXPRESSED BELIEF THERE WERE HARDLINERS IN FEDERAL
MILITARY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, INCLUDING FONMIN, WHOM

GOWON WOULD HAVE TO LISTEN TO. BORDER PROBLEM WAS AN
IMPORTANT MATTER TO RESOLVE BUT HE SHOWED LITTLE OPTIMISM
THAT AN EARLY BREAKTHROUGH WAS LIKELY.

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